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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SAA-02 SSM-03 IO-13 HA-05
ACDA-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00
ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 EUR-12 /095 W
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O 051412Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8642
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3827

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, PINS, LE, SY, US
SUBJ: FIGHTING IN BEIRUT

REF: STATE 168733

1. SUMMARY: POLOFF DELIVERED COPY OF SECRETARY'S JULY 3 LEBANON STATEMENT TO MFA AT ITS REQUEST. DURING DISCUSSION WITH DIRECTOR AMERICAN AFFAIRS, HE ASKED ABOUT REPORTED SYRIAN CONDITIONS FOR CEASE-FIRE NOTING THAT NEW ADF POSITIONS IN EAST BEIRUT COULD LEAD TO MORE FIGHTING AND LESS CONTROL SIAGE SAID HE WOULD TRY TO FIND OUT AND NOTED BOUTROS IS IN DAMASCUS NOW DISCUSSING SITUATION. HE ASKED THAT USG UNDERSTAND IMPOSSIBLE POSTITION ADF IS IN. ADF CANNOT ALLOW OPEN SEASON ON ITS SOLDIERS HE REQUESTED USG TO WEIGH IN WITH LEBANESE RIGHTISTS AND ISRAELIS TO STOP SENSELESS SLAUGHTER. POLOFF STATED UNOFFICIALLY THAT US CONTINUES TO STAND BEHIND CENTRAL LEBANESE GOVERN-
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MENT AND THAT WE APPRECIATE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE SYRIA HAS PLEAYED UP TO THIS POINT THROUGH ADF, BUT WE ARE CONCERNED THAT DISPROPORTIONATE ADF RESPONSE TO PROVOCATIONS COULD HAVE EFFECT OF UNDERMINING PRESIDENT SARKIS' AUTHORITY RATHER THAN REINFORCING IT. END SUMMARY.

2. AT REQUEST OF MFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIVISION DIRECTOR

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SIAGE, POLOFF WALKER PROVIDED MFA WITH COPY OF SECRETARY'S JULY 3 STATEMENT ON LEBANON (REFTEL). SIAGE WELCOMED SECRETARY'S STATEMENT AND ALSO OUR UNOFFICIAL VIEW EXPRESSED BY POLOFF THAT US POLICY HAD NOT UNDERGONE ANY CHANGE.

3. SIAGE SAID THAT HE HAD SPENT PAST FEW DAYS ALMOST ENTIRELY ON SITUATION IN LEBANON. FONMIN KHADDAM HAD CONSULTED HIM SEVERAL TIMES REGARDING US POSITION AND HAD ALSO USED HIM IN CONTACTS WITH LEBANESE CHRISTIANS (SIAGE IS BOTH A CHRISTIAN HIMSELF AND A BAATH PARTY MEMBER).

4. SIAGE ASKED THAT USG UNDERSTAND THE IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION SARG IS FACING. CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL ARE INTENT ON DIVIDING LEBANON OR RULING IT AUTOCRATICALLY. IN THIS THEY ARE ENCOURAGED BY ISRAELI OPERATIONS INSIDE LEBANON. THE ISRAELI INTEREST IS TO SEE SYRIA PINNED DOWN IN A WAR OF ATTRITION. BELIEVING THEY HAVE ISRAELI BACKING, THE PHALANGE AND NLP ARE EMBOLDENED TO PROVOKE THE ADF. IF THE ADF DOES NOT REACT, ITS TROOPS WILL BECOME SITTING DUCKS FOR ANY CHRISTIAN WITH A GUN. THE PHALANGE AND NLP MUST KNOW THAT THEY CANNOT ACT AGAINST THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY IN LEBANON WITH IMPUNITY. UNFORTUNATELY, THE RIGHTISTS CAN MELT BACK INTO THEIR COMMUNITY AND THE COMMUNITY IS SUFFERING THE CONSEQUENCES. SYRIA DOES NOT WANT TO KILL CIVILIANS OR DESTROY HOMES, BUT NEITHER CAN IT ALLOW THE ESCALATION OF ATTACKS ON ITS OWN SOLDIERS. SAIGE POINTED OUT THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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SYRIA IS IN LEBANON BECAUSE IT ALONE AMONG THE ARAB STATES SEES ITS OWN SECURITY TIED TO THE SECURITY OF LEBANON. INDEPENDENT MINI STATES AFFILIATED WITH ISRAEL OR IRAQ WOULD BE INTOLERABLE. IF THE ADF WERE TO WITHDRAW, THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE A RETURN TO CIVIL WAR. DOES THE PHALANGE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE BETTER OFF THAN IT WAS WHEN SYRIA CAM IN TO RESCUE IT FROM THE LEFTISTS AND PALESTINIANS BEFORE? THEY ARE BITING THE HAND THAT FED THEM.

5. SIAGE SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HOPED THE USG WOULD USE ITS STRONG LEVERAGE WITH CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL TO COUNSEL RESTRAIN AND SUPPORT FOR SARKIS. HE ALSO HOPED WE WOULD TALK TO ISRAELIS IN THIS REGARD. POLOFF TOLD HIM THAT VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE HAD REAISED QUESTION WITH PRIMIN BEGIN WHO SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION.

6. STRESSING HE WAS NOT SPEAKING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS, POLOFF SAID THAT USG HAD NOT CHANGED ITS POSITION ON LEBANON. WE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON AND WE CONTINUE TO APPRECIATE THE ROLE SYRIA HAS PLAYED IN THE PAST IN STABILIZING THE LEBANON SITUATION. WE UNDERSTAND THE FIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH IT MUST OPERATE.

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NEVERTHELESS, POLOFF SIAD WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE OVER-
WHELMING REACTION OF ADF FORCES TO RIGHTIST PROVOCATIONS.
WE ARE CONCERNED NOT ONLY ABOUT THE LOSS OF INNOCENT
CIVILIAN LIFE, BUT ALSO THE ADF ACTION COULD HAVE THE
EFFECT OF UNDERMINING PRESIDENT SARKIS' LEGITIMACY AMONG
A SIGNIFICANT SECTOR OF THE LEBANESE POPULATION RATHER
THAN REINFORCING IT. THE CIVILIAN POPULATION WHICH SUFFERS
THE BRUNT OF THE ADF FIRE CANNOT HELP BUT QUESTION THE
LEGITIMACY OF THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY WHICH CONDONES SUCH
DESTRUCTION. MANY COULD CONCLUDE THAT ADF PRESENCE IN
LEBANON WAS INIMICAL TO THEIR INTERESTS. NEITHER CONCLUSION
IS IN THE INTEREST OF THE CENTRAL LEBANESE AUTHORITY OR OF
POLITICAL RECONCILIATION.

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7. POLOFF SAID HE HAD HEARD FROM ISRAEL AND OTHER RADIO
REPORTS THAT SYRIA WAS MAKING CEASE-FIRE CONTITIONAL ON
EITHER CHRISTIANS LAYING DOWN THEIR WEAPONS OR SYRIANS
TAKING UP NEW POSITIONS IN EAST BEIRUT. FORMER CONDITION
STRUCK HIM AS IMPOSSIBLE AND LATTER MIGHT LEAD TO MORE FIGHTING
AND LESS CONTROL. SIAGE REPLIED THAT HE WAS NOT AWARE
OF ANY CONDITIONS HOWEVER, FONMIN BOUTROS WAS IN DAMASCUS
TO DAY TO DISCUSS SITUATION. HE WOULD TRY TO FIND OUT ABOUT
POSSIBLE CONDITIONS AND LET US KNOW.

8. SIAGE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD POINT ABOUT ADG ACTIONS RISKING
UNDERMINING SARKIS HE NOTED THAT ADF WAS TRYING TO DO
JUST THE OPPOSITE BY ASSERTING ITS AUTHORITY AND DETERRING
FUTURE PROVOCATIONS NEVERTHELESS, HE COULD APPRECIATE
POSSIBLE DISTINCTION BETWEEN AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY.
HE ADDED THAT HE WOULD CONVEY POINTS OF CONVERSTATION TO
FONMIN KHADDAM. (POLOFF REMINEDE SIAGE HE HAD BEEN TALKING
PERSONALLY AND NOT UNDER INSTRUCTIONS.)

9. SIAGE CONCLUDED THAT THE US AND SYRIA HAVE PARALLEL
INTERESTS IN LEBANON. HE WELCOMED THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS
ON HOW TO PROCEED. HE HOPED WE COULD HELP IN BRINGING
SENSELESS FIGHTING TO AN END AND HE REITERATED HIS HOPE
THAT THE US WOULD USE ITS INFLUENCE TO DISABUSE THE
PHALANGE AND NLP OF THE NOTION THAT THEY COULD IGNORE
THE ASPIRATIONS OF ALL OTHER SEGEMENTSOF LEBANON'S POPULA-
TION AND RUN THE STATE LIKE A MAFIA FAMILY.
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Review Release Event: n/a
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Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FIGHTING IN BEIRUT
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, PINS, LE, SY, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
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